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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON IRAQ AND MIDDLE EAST

#### Summary

-- The lead story in all papers today, March 18, focuses on President Bush's address to the American people yesterday and the 48-hour ultimatum for Saddam to "leave or face war". A number of editorial commentaries focus on the killing of U.S. peace activist, Rachel Corey, crushed by an Israeli bulldozer.

#### Editorial Commentary

-- "War it is"

Center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (03/18) editorializes: "Washington and London have justified their political and military attack on Iraq by claiming that the Iraqi regime has violated the will of the international community. When Iraq did the bidding of the international community and the international community rejected war, the two allies retracted their claims and instead talked about the post-war era, claiming that a war on Iraq would be in the best interest of Iraq and the world. It is as if this region is destined to suffer from 'double standards', and then pay the price of the 'reversed standards' that Washington brought forth.. War it is, then, which will pour oil on an already raging fire of anger, frustration and desperation in the region."

-- "So the war may pass"

Columnist Ibrahim Absi writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (03/18): "After losing hope of realizing a new Security Council resolution that would unleash his killing in Iraq, the American President resorted to playing the Palestinian card, to hide behind it and to portray his administration, which is so preoccupied with preparations for war, as being interested in resolving the Palestinian cause and establishing a Palestinian state. It is a not so innocent attempt on his part to combine war and peace on one level, the Arab level, to convince the Arabs of the need to be quiet while Iraq is being slaughtered in return for establishing the promised Palestinian state. This is not the first time that the Palestinian card was played by the Americans to hide their shortcomings."

-- "A crazy moment"

Chief Editor Taher Udwan writes on the back-page of independent, mass-appeal Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm (03/18): "The people of this region and the world view Bush's war as an inescapable plague. The ironic issue here is that the American President wants to make 'the implementation of Security Council resolutions' on Iraq the moral and ethical basis for his imminent war. Bush's war may achieve its military purpose. However, as of today, this war is going to be a colonialist war, a war of occupation, and a war of arrogant force against law and international legitimacy. This is going to make 'the American occupation' and not 'the American globalization' the state that marks the relationship between the Arab and Muslim people and America. And this is a state of conflict."

GNEHM